

Intense Conversations: How To Handle Annoying People

Instructor Guide

WV Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Training and Development Section



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*Whatever the mind can conceive and
believe, the mind can achieve.*

Dr. Napoleon Hill

Introduction

Welcome to the “Intense Conversations: Handling Annoying People” workshop.

How do you know that you need to have an intense conversation with someone who is annoying you one way or another?

Do you –

- Change the subject
- Hold back
- Tell little lies (and big ones)
- Find yourself being imprecise in your language
- Find yourself being uninteresting even to yourself?

“When you come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real, whatever happens from there will happen. It could go well or it could get a little bumpy, but at least you will have taken the plunge. You will have said at least one real thing today, one thing that was real for you. And something will have been set in motion, and you will have grown from that moment.” Susan Scott

Susan Scott came up with some principles for having intense conversations. How can having an intense conversation with someone make us more effective at work and at home? What will we achieve?

INTENSE CONVERSATIONS

Before Intense Conversations	After Intense Conversations
Focus on activities. On reasons on why it is not possible to reach individual or group goals. Stalled initiatives.	Focus on results. Deep-seated accountability. Initiatives executed.
Beating around the bush, dancing around the subject, skirting the issues. No one engages. Nothing changes.	Naming and addressing the issues truthfully and effectively. Impetus for change.
An “us” versus “them” or “me versus you” culture. Politics, turf wars, competition for resources and attentions.	High levels of alignment, collaboration, partnership at all levels throughout the organization.
Leaders overwhelmed by the complexity of their tasks. Everything is a priority.	The timely resolution of periodic leadership challenges. Clear priorities.
Leaders micromanaging instead of leading. No grassroots leadership development.	Improvement in leadership effectiveness, development of quality “bench” to fill future leadership positions.
Original thinking is happening elsewhere. Sleepwalking through the manual.	Shared enthusiasm for agility, continued learning and epiphanies; shared standard of performance.
A culture of terminal “niceness.” Avoiding or working around problem employees. Tolerating mediocrity.	Effectively confronting attitudinal, performance or behavioral issues. Enhanced employee capacity to serve as effective agents for strategic change.

Emotional Intelligence is defined as a set of competencies demonstrating the ability one has to recognize his or her behaviors, moods, and impulses, and to manage them best according to the situation.

Why do you think that we are talking about YOUR behaviors, moods, etc. if this workshop is about managing annoying peoples’ behaviors?

The reason is that, even with a lot of training and manipulation, you might be able to effect a change in the behavior of the other guy. However, more often than not, this is not the outcome. Usually, we can only control ourselves and our own behaviors and reactions. This workshop will help you with the tools you need to be emotionally intelligent in your workplace. **An employee with high emotional intelligence can manage his or her own impulses, communicate with others effectively, manage change well, solve problems, and use humor to build rapport**

in tense situations. These employees also have empathy, and remain optimistic even in the face of adversity.

Workshop Objectives

This workshop is designed to help you in the following ways:

- Define and practice self-management, self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, and empathy.
- Recognize, use and manage your emotions.
- Verbally communicate more effectively with others.
- Communicate with others in an effective non-verbal manner.
- Identify the benefits of emotional intelligence.
- Relate emotional intelligence to the workplace.
- Balance optimism and pessimism.
- Effectively impact others.

Experience is not what happens to you – it's how you interpret what happens to you.

Aldous Huxley



Module One: What is Emotional Intelligence?

Emotional Intelligence is a part of you that affects every aspect of your life. Understanding the root causes of your emotions and how to use them can help you to effectively identify who you are and how you interact with others.

With Emotional Intelligence being a fairly new branch of psychology, its definition can be found in various theories and models. We are presenting a definition influenced by a few theories, and mainly popularized by Daniel Goleman's 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence*.

Benefits of Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is “*the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth* (Mayer-Salovey, Four Branch Model of Emotional Intelligence).

Focusing on the importance of Emotional Intelligence and developing EI skills serves many benefits. Specifically, it affects one decision-making ability, relationships, and health.

- **Decision-making.** Having an awareness of your emotions, where they come from and what they mean, can allow you to take a more rational, well-planned approach to how you are going to make a specific decision.
- **Relationships.** When one is able to understand why they are the way they are and why they react to things the way they do, they tend to gain more of an appreciation for others and who they are, which can in turn lead to stronger relationships, business and personal.
- **Health.** Many times, internal turmoil expresses itself as physical illnesses. Always harboring negative emotions can lead to higher stress levels in the body, which can temporarily or fatally damage it.

Role of Emotional Intelligence at Work

Emotional Intelligence plays a vital role in the workplace. How one feels about himself, interacts with others, and handles conflict is directly reflected in the quality of work produced. Both social and personal proficiencies are developed as a result of Emotional Intelligence.

Social Proficiencies

- Empathy – Being aware of others' feelings and exhibiting compassion.

- Intuition – An inner sense of the feelings of others’.
- Political Acumen – Ability to communicate, strong influence and leadership skills, and conflict-resolution.

Personal Proficiencies

- Self-Awareness – Understanding one’s own emotions. The ability to assess one’s self as well as display confidence.
- Self-Regulation – Managing one’s emotions. Maintaining trustworthiness and flexibility.
- Motivation - Being optimistic about situations. Having the drive to take initiative and commit until completion.

Self-Management

In order to effectively achieve your overall career objectives or the objectives within a given task, you must use clearly defined methods to carry out those activities. This includes the setting of goals, decision making, planning, and scheduling. Once the tasks are completed, you must evaluate the success of these methods.

The following is a list of five key points to remember to help you master the art of self-management.

- **Be consistent.** Part of managing oneself is the ability to be stable. The values you hold dear should always be transparent. Always changing can not only cause others to question your beliefs, but it can also cause you to become confused about what you truly believe.
- **Stick to the plan.** If you are scheduled to complete a particular task, do it. Don’t just do it, but make sure it is done in a timely manner. It is easy to feel out of control when you disregard the plan you are to follow.
- **Be accountable.** There are times when things don’t work out as you plan, but you have to be able to admit that and then use your flexibility to get things back on track. The ideal result is that you easily bounce back and complete the task, but even during those times when this is not the case, you are expected to adjust.
- **Educate yourself.** We live in an ever-changing world and you want to be able to keep up with it. Don’t let change pass you by, embrace it. Be an avid reader. Talk and listen to mentors and peers. They may know something that could help you along your journey.
- **Stay physically fit.** Many people don’t think of staying fit when they talk about self-management, but it is a very important part of being able to practice the four preceding points. Exercising your body is just as crucial to self-management as exercising your

mind. A body that is not well rested, nutritionally fed, or physically exercised can lead to emotional and physical illnesses.

Self-Awareness

Being 'aware' of one's self is the ability to accurately perceive one's skills and knowledge, value and responsibilities. It is being confident in what you have to offer, whether it is personally or professionally.

Self-awareness is not only important for one's self-esteem, but it is also the first step to the process of full acceptance or change. Without understanding why one thinks the way he thinks or why he acts the way he acts, he may never fully appreciate himself or see the importance of making changes to improve him, if necessary. Self-awareness gives power and a sense of peace or happiness. This newly found strength will more than likely carry over into your work life, how you perform your duties as well as how you interact with others.

The lack of self-awareness can cause you to not realize your worth in the company or even the quality of the work you perform. This can have an even more dramatic effect when you hold a leadership position. Not only will you have doubts about yourself, but the people you lead will also begin to question your competence, which could ultimately lead to a lack of leadership effectiveness.

Self-Regulation

Self-Regulation is another term for 'self-control', which is defined as the ability to control one's emotions, desires, and behaviors in order to reach a positive outcome. Self-regulation is sometimes difficult because of the phenomenon that it is important to 'express how you feel'. While this may be partially true, the art to finding the balance between expressing one's feelings and avoiding unnecessary tension is self-regulation.

Self-Regulation is a direct reflection of the type of pressure one is experiencing. There are three types of pressure:

1. **Good Pressure:** This type of pressure is the result of an aggressive yet non-critical and non-harmful atmosphere. One aspires to be like the people around them. This motivation leads to the acquisition of self-regulation.
2. **Bad Pressure:** Bad pressure is the when the atmosphere is critical and harmful. One has no motivation and loses self-regulation.
3. **No Pressure:** When one is not experiencing any pressure, they tend to act based on emotion, since there is no one to compare themselves to.

Worksheet: Express Yourself

Read through the following scenarios. Write your first response to each. Do not over-analyze the scenario or answer it with what 'sounds the best'. Give your honest feedback.

1. You are the team lead for a project at work and your boss yells at you because it was not completed by the required deadline. You:

2. You find out that several of your co-workers are talking about you behind your back to the boss. They are telling your boss that you are slacking on the job and that the quality of your work is poor. You:

3. One of the company's clients called and told your manager that you were very rude to him. You know the client spoke to a co-worker who sits next to you, not you. You:

Self-Motivation

Andrew Carnegie said it best with his quote "*People who are unable to motivate themselves must be content with mediocrity, no matter how impressive their other talents.*" Self-motivation is an essential part of excelling at life. You must learn to motivate yourself because you cannot depend on others to do it for you. You have to know how to encourage yourself regardless of how bad the situation. There are several keys to building self-motivation.

- Work towards a cause.
- Don't compare yourself to others.
- Make the conscious effort to not give up.
- Don't live in your past failures or successes.
- Utilize positive thinking.

There are times when you may need motivation to get motivated. Positive thinking may not be doing the trick. What should you do? Consider these suggestions:

- Write down your plan for improvement.
- *Briefly* think about your past successes.
- Read books that promote self-motivation.

Module Two: Skills in Emotional Intelligence

Developing successful Emotional Intelligence begins by understanding your emotions and their meanings. With this understanding, you must uncover productive ways to manage your emotions, then use them to the benefit yourself and others.

How to Accurately Perceive Emotions

The words that people say are only half of the message they are trying to get across. The tone in which they say it, or the emotion tied to their words, is the other half. For example, if your boss says, "We're going to have to let you go" with the look of concern or in a caring tone of voice, he /she are actually saying, "Unfortunately, we are going to have to let you go." On the other hand, if your boss makes that statement, trying hard to keep from laughing, he / she could be saying, "Fortunately, we are going to have to let you go."

The ability to decide the manner, in which things are being said, lies in your knack of being able to decode the message by looking beyond the words themselves. It is important that you do not allow your emotional state of being to cloud your judgment of what is being said. Focus on the message (verbally and non-verbally) itself in order to accurately perceive the emotions of others.

Worksheet: Say What You Mean

Read through the scenarios and verbally respond using the specified emotion.

1. You were recently offered a position within the company that pays more but also requires greater responsibility, responsibilities that you don't believe you can handle.

Respond in a happy manner: I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to joining the team.

Respond in an apprehensive manner: I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to joining the team.

Respond in a confused manner: I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to joining the team.

2. You just found out one of your weakest team members is leaving the company. You tell him:

Respond in an angry manner: I am so sad to see you go.

Respond in an indifferent manner: I am so sad to see you go.

Respond in a worried manner: I am so sad to see you go.

3. You have been put on a verbal warning due to your tardiness. You say:

Respond in a sincere manner: I truly apologize for my tardiness. It will not happen again.

Respond in a defensive manner: I truly apologize for my tardiness. It will not happen again.

Respond in a carefree manner: I truly apologize for my tardiness. It will not happen again.

Use Emotions to Facilitate Thinking

'Use emotions to facilitate thinking' is such a profound statement. How one feels will determine how he/she views situations. If you are in a happy mood, everyday events don't seem so bad. On the contrary, if you are not in a happy mood, even the smallest of situations can seem major to you.

When it comes to the workplace, regardless of your mood, your boss expects you to be a high performer. Make it easy on yourself and 'choose' to be in a good mood.

Understand Emotional Meanings

The underlying reason for why you feel the way you do is very important to understand. If you know why you are unhappy, you can either alter the thing that is making you unhappy or consciously tell yourself that 'thing' is not worth allowing you to be upset, which can ultimately turn your negative mood into a positive one. Having this understanding can not only be used to internally gauge yourself, but can also help with how you interact with co-workers.

Manage Emotions

Knowing what emotion you are exhibiting or understanding the reason for that emotion is not enough to manage your emotions. Managing your emotions is a conscious and active task. This can be done in several ways. The overall goal is to establish strategies that utilize your emotions to help accomplish a goal rather than allowing your emotions to use you to create a futile outcome.

It is important to remember that your emotions are not the 'enemy'. They contain valuable information that if used properly, can help you make sound decisions.

Dealing with Difficult Personalities

A huge source of stress at work is the need to adjust to different personalities. Each person is unique, and even when you're dealing with a responsible and emotionally mature co-worker, friction is inevitable simply because the other person will never be 100% similar to you. But the stress of interacting with co-workers gets multiplied a hundredfold when the other person doesn't just have a different personality, but also a difficult one.

What may be considered as a difficult personality?

The answer is subjective; a difficult personality for one person need not be a difficult personality for another. But usually, people perceived as difficult are those who manifest *inflexible extremes* of personality traits.

For instance, while being controlling is a desirable trait in a manager (after all, a manager's job is to control what is happening in a workplace!), being excessively controlling would just make the people under the manager's care feel stifled and even abused. Recognition of the need to consult co-workers about major company decisions is a good thing. But when an employee consults everyone else on almost everything, to the point that the constant "consultation" is already dependency in disguise, then the person becomes difficult to work with.

When working with a difficult personality, most people's immediate response is an unhelpful one: a response aimed more at relieving personal stress than creating a more workable relationship. For instance, there is a tendency to avoid dominant personality types, lecture the overly dependent, and exact vengeance on the passive-aggressive. The result is an endless cycle of dysfunctional relating that creates more problems than it solves.

Civility is one of the best ways to deal with difficult personalities in the workplace.

Civility sets the stage for effective communication --- in many ways, dealing with difficult personalities is simply a matter of setting and negotiating boundaries. After all, difficult personalities are not "bad people." They just have a fixed way of relating and may need feedback from peers in order to adjust.

Module Three: Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills

Strong verbal communication skills are important in all facets of life. Without these essentials, one may find it hard to get a personal point across, articulate needs and desires or even compete in the business world. There are many factors that contribute to solid communication skills.

Focused Listening

One of the best ways to ensure someone that you are truly listening to what they are saying is to intently listen. To some this may sound like common sense, but it is a skill that is seldom mastered. Usually when engaged in a conversation, the listener is multitasking. They are listening with one part of the brain and preparing a response with the other. It is painfully obvious when a person is not wholeheartedly interested in what someone else has to say. Not only does this make the listener look uncaring, but it may also influence the speaker to go elsewhere when he needs to speak about matters.

Whether you are in a leadership role or an individual contributor, strong listening skills are essential to your success. Hearing something other than what is being said or trying to think of what to say while the speaker is talking, can have dire consequences. Regardless of the industry you work in, focused listening is a great skill to sharpen.

Asking Questions

Asking probing questions is a component that goes hand-in-hand with focused listening. Rarely does someone truly understand everything another is saying without at least asking a couple of probing questions. The key is to not ask questions for the sake of asking questions, or ask questions that do not relate to the conversation.

Communicating with Flexibility and Authenticity

When speaking to another, the one rule you want to always observe is that you are being honest about what you are saying. This can be somewhat of a challenge because we are taught to speak with diplomacy; being politically correct, especially in the business-world. While this is true, it is still necessary to make sure you are not sugar-coating or dancing around an issue, as this can cloud the meaning of what is being communicated. Effective communication does not require the speaker to repeat or continuously restate what is being said.

Even though sometimes one is as honest or clear as they could possibly be, it takes a little more work to relay the message. The ability to be flexible in your speech, whether to make your meaning more clear or to 'show off' that diplomacy you have been working so hard at, is significant for verbal communication success.

Non-Verbal Communication Skills

There is more to communication than the words one speaks or message being conveyed. There are also non-verbal cues that we all use in everyday conversations. Being mindful of the signals you send others through body language and the manner in which you speak may get your point across a lot faster than your mere words.

Body Language

The saying, 'Actions speak louder than words' is so true in the world of business. It is easy to shower someone with promises, but when it is time to perform, if the actions do not measure up to the words spoken, the words spoken will be forgotten.

The use of body language can have both positive and negative effects. The thing to remember about body language is that if you are not conscious of what your body is doing while you are talking, the wrong message could be conveyed. For example, if you are smiling while giving someone condolences on the loss of their loved one, that could be construed as inappropriate and your words insincere. On the other hand, if you are congratulating someone on a job well done, but do so with a frown on your face, you could appear to be unhappy for the person.

The Signals You Send to Others.

Sending non-verbal signals to someone can be a great way to reinforce what you've said. It can also be used as a tool to further explain what you're trying to say. However, it can confuse the listener. This can be a valuable skill as long as you are conscious of it and have trained yourself to have a positive effect rather than using it as an uncertain form of communication.

Activity: Common Gestures

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It

The manner in which you say something could be the factor that determines what the listener hears. It is important to be aware of your emotions, body language, tone, speed, and pitch when you speak. It may sound like a lot of work and until it becomes second nature, it may be, but consistently doing so can produce a favorable outcome. It is possible to send the wrong message without intentionally doing it, so be careful. An innocent request such as 'Please shred that document' can sound like a rude command.

Articulate Your Emotions Using Language

As a child, it may be acceptable to 'act out your emotions' to get your point across, but when you become an adult it is frowned upon and certainly not appropriate in the work place. Emotions will never go away, but that is not an excuse to say, do, and behave anyway we want to. It is important to understand our emotions, what they are, and why we feel that way, and then share our feelings via positive and constructive conversation.

When in a leadership role, you may encounter several opportunities to express yourself, whether it is praising a worker for a job well done, or reprimanding an employee for not meeting deadline. But the key to making sure you articulate your emotions in an effective and efficient manner is to channel those emotions so that your message comes across as firm but professional.

Module Four: Tools to Regulate Your Emotions

The ability to keep your emotions under control requires more than a willing heart.

Understanding a situation through the eyes of another and strengthening self-management and self-awareness skills are tools that can be used in your quest to regulate your emotions.

Seeing the Other Side

If you ever want to understand the type of person you are and how you behave, ask other people. It is easy to justify the things you do, so much so that it seems like everything you do is perfect. If you take an honest look at yourself, you would probably say not only is this perfection untrue for you, but it is unattainable for all.

Talk to your boss, co-workers or friends about how they view you. If someone says, *'When everything is good you are a nice person, but if something doesn't go your way, you have an explosive temper'*, don't get upset and don't automatically say that it is untrue. Gaining this insight is a valuable tool for you to help regulate your emotions. Your emotions and how you express them is your responsibility. If you don't like it, fix it. This takes courage, because many times we may not want to hear what we perceive are criticisms about our behaviors. However, if we do not have the courage to face the reality of others' perceptions of us, we may never be able to improve our communication and relationships with others. And let's face it – without others, it is very hard to be successful at our jobs.

Self-Management and Self-Awareness

Self-management can sometimes be a hard quality to tame when self-awareness produces a very arrogant and self-centered result. The strength to self-management and self-awareness lies in the balance between the two. Understanding who you are, the role you play, authority you possess are all very important, but when these things overshadow your ability to be consistent and accountable, this could cause a poor outcome. By the same token, if one lacks understanding of whom they are and their importance, this could also hinder their ability to be consistent and accountable. People who are aware of their methods of dealing with conflict and understand the bearing of their way of doing things aren't as likely to make matters worse than those who are not aware of themselves.

Giving in Without Giving Up

Compromise is an unavoidable part of dealing with others in both the business world and in personal relationships. The ideal situation would be that everyone agrees with everything you say, but that is highly unlikely. Unless you live in a society that does not value diplomacy, this is a skill that will present plenty of opportunities for you to master it.

This can be even more of an issue when you are in a position of less influence. You may be expected to compromise at a greater level or even expected to follow the lead of your superiors, without regard to your own feelings or opinions. In either case, learning how to have your

beliefs, while accepting the ideas of others and not causing tension in the relationship is crucial to your success in the work place.

Worksheet: To Be or Not to Be

Read each scenario and create a solution of compromise.

1. For a job well done, John wants to take the team out for a steak lunch, while his co-manager, Amy wants to take the team out for seafood. How can they compromise?

2. Mike wants to introduce an internet-based training to the team, but Peter believes this will not effectively present the material, and therefore suggests they provide a face-to-face, classroom training. How they can compromise?

3. Elizabeth believes the quality team at the local site should perform quality reviews for only the work of the representatives at the local site. However, Patty says the quality team at that site should conduct quality checks for the representatives of the all regional sites. How can they compromise?

Module Five: Gaining Control – of Ourselves

Just by the very nature of the word, control is a very powerful thing to have. Having control causes companies to become multi-billion dollar entities and nations to crumble. This is no less important when it comes to having control over yourself, your thoughts, and emotions. Having control or the lack thereof could be the difference between building a successful career and no career at all. If you have control over these aspects of your life, pat yourself on the back. If you do not, read the following to obtain the necessary tools to become the master of your fate.

Using Coping Thoughts

The power of the mind is amazing. Every day, you will encounter at least one situation that requires you to use the calming forces of your mind, to overcome the potential anxiety of the issue at hand. In order to use these forces, you must have a reservoir that consists of them. When you find yourself in a situation that requires coping skills, do the following:

- **Take a deep breath.** Deep breathing has an amazingly calming effect on the brain. By taking a deep breath or two, you can easily avoid your first, natural reaction to a stressful situation. This can prevent you from saying something or physically acting out in a manner that is inappropriate and may require you to apologize later on.
- **Step away from the issue.** Mentally take yourself away from the situation and analyze the issue itself. Ask yourself if it is something worth using your emotions on. Does it truly impact you? Will your emotions bring forth a resolution to the problem or just create internal conflict for you?
- **Use positive thinking.** Even if the situation requires you to physically act, you do not want to approach it with thoughts of anger, sadness or other negative emotions. Consciously tell your mind to think 'happy thoughts'. Thinking happy thoughts is not a way to avoid the problem, but rather a way to prepare you to tackle it in a productive manner.

Using Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques are not just used to help you 'feel better'; they actually play a major role in reducing the stress on your body and mind that comes from the experiences of everyday life.

According to the Mayo Clinic, relaxation techniques can reduce stress symptoms by:

- Slowing your heart rate
- Lowering blood pressure
- Slowing your breathing rate
- Increasing blood flow to major muscles

- Reducing muscle tension and chronic pain
- Improving concentration
- Reducing anger and frustration
- **Boosting confidence to handle problems**

Activity : Practice cycle breathing

Ask: Can you remember the last time you found yourself reacting aggressively to someone else? Did your heart rate begin to go up in response to his/her aggression? How did you react? Were you able to keep yourself calm? If so, how?

To minimize your risk, you can initiate Cycle Breathing, a proven method for controlling aggression. Law enforcement and the military use it to train for aggression control. You should practice this often and when you are in an aggressive situation, cycle breathing can keep your heart rate lower and influence your escalation of aggression.

Have participants follow the directions as you give these instructions:

CYCLE BREATHING EXERCISE:

- **Close your eyes**
- **Breathe in slowly and deeply to the count of 4**
- **Hold breath 2 counts**
- **Exhale to the count of 4**
- **Hold 2 counts**
- **Wiggle your fingers and toes then slowly open your eyes**

Can you see how it might be very valuable to be the person who keeps a calm demeanor and learns to control the response to another person's negative behavior?

Using Cycle Breathing once you are aware that you are beginning to react to others' behaviors can be very helpful to you for keeping your aggression under control. You can practice this technique any time, any day. If you practice using it enough, you will be able to hold your body's reaction to aggression in check to a small degree. Now we will see what happens when aggression is allowed to continue to escalate.

Bringing it All Together

Once you have mastered the art of coping with difficult situations, it may not be necessary to engage in relaxation techniques as much. But until you have reached that point and maybe even afterwards, finding effective ways to relax yourself and take control of the situation is highly beneficial. Whether it is dealing with an unruly co-worker or a demanding boss, not allowing negativity to get the best of your emotions can benefit your mind, body and soul, which is the ultimate goal.

Disagreeing Constructively

To disagree constructively means to do so in a positive, productive manner. Its purpose is not to disagree for the sake of disagreeing or getting your point across. ***You don't have to win!*** It is also not used to be negative or to destroy the other guy's ideas, thoughts, or opinions. The workplace is a place where disagreeing is a common occurrence. Companies look for the most effective ways to carry out operations and therefore invest in process improvement strategies, which opens the floor for discussion and compromise.

What does constructively disagreeing look like in practice, you may ask. Well, it is acknowledging and confirming someone else's ideas before presenting your own.

Is Your Glass Half Full or Empty?

Have you ever heard the phrase "life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you deal with what happens?" The ability to stay positive no matter what happens in your life is what makes all the difference between being worried and stressed – or confident and relaxed.

Optimism and pessimism are two schools of thought adopted by individuals within organizations. Neither extreme is considered better than the other. The proper balance of the two is a fundamental part of best business practices.

Optimism

Possessing the quality of 'optimism' is the ability to find the bright side of every situation. This is an admirable position that not all have. The secret to exhibiting this characteristic is to understand that there are no issues that cannot have a positive spin.

Not only is this beneficial for an individual's personal life, but optimism can be a competitive advantage in the business world. Like every other entity, businesses suffer losses and setbacks, but the trick to maintaining the stability of a company is leadership that knows how to look past the current problem to a nearby resolution. Optimistic employees tend to be more productive in terms of the quality and quantity of their work and therefore make more money for the company.

Who wants to follow a leader that whimpers at the sight of trouble just like the people he is leading? Not many people can honestly say they desire this type of leader.

Optimism is also good for your health. There have been several studies performed that conclude those who live life with a bright outlook, generally live longer than those who do not. Also, optimists are likely to have more long-lasting, successful personal relationships.

Worksheet: Is the Glass Half Full?

Read through the following statements and verbally give a positive response to each statement.

1. The morale of the team is down.

2. We have to work overtime this weekend.
3. My quality level is 1 percentage point below the requirement.
4. The training class does not understand the material they are being taught.
5. This work environment is too fast-paced.
6. This department may be downsizing.
7. Several people got upset in today's meeting.
8. My computer is moving slowly.
9. We did not receive all of the reference material we need to complete the project.
10. The manager's instructions are not clear.

Pessimism

Pessimism is the exact opposite of optimism. Instead of viewing the glass as 'half full' or having a positive outlook on situations, pessimists can only see the down side of most issues.

As you would expect, pessimism in the workplace can be very detrimental to the individual's career growth and the well-being of the company as a whole. A pessimist who holds a leadership role can bring down the productivity and morale of the team, just by his or her very nature. An individual contributor with this type of attitude may never get promoted to leadership positions.

What about the health factors associated with this pessimism? Pessimists generally suffer a lot of bodily and mental stress, which can manifest itself in a variety of ways such as heart disease, diabetes, and even cancer. So what's the moral of the story? Don't worry, be happy.

The Balance between Optimism and Pessimism

Extremism may not be a desirable trait in a person. This is also true when it comes to optimism and pessimism. Being optimistic about every situation could potentially lead a person away from reality and taking the proper steps to resolve a situation. It could also give someone a false hope, which would ultimately lead to disappointment which could in turn cause the person to abandon all optimism.

Module Six: The Seven Principles of Intense Conversations:

PRINCIPLE 1: Master the Courage to Interrogate Reality

There is something within us that responds deeply to people who level with us. Companies and marriages derail because people don't say what they are really thinking. Perhaps what we thought was the truth is no longer the truth in today's environment. Reality is unforgivingly complex. The person who can most accurately describe reality without laying blame will emerge the leader.

Honesty means full disclosure to yourself and others, with good intent. You have to get at ground truth before you can turn anything around.

What is ground truth? It is actually a military term, describing what's actually happening on the ground versus the official tactics. *Ground truth* is what you hear around water coolers, in bathrooms, in the parking lot, is rarely offered up for public consumption and rarely ever shows up when you need it the most. *Official truth* is available for general circulation and is viewed by most team members as "propaganda."

Activity: Describe the following truths as you perceive them:

Official truths in My Workplace:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Ground Truths in My Workplace:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Official Truths in My Life:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Ground Truths in My Life:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Debrief:

PRINCIPLE 2: Come Out From Behind Yourself into the Conversation and Make it Real

Authenticity is not something that you have; it is something you *choose*. What are you pretending *not* to know? The truth will set you free – but first it may thoroughly irritate you! It takes courage to look at ourselves unflinchingly in the mirror called our lives.

Activity: Intense Conversations I Need to Have: List person(s) you know that you need to have an intense conversation with but have put off for one reason or another. Then list the topic that you need to discuss with this person.

PERSON:

TOPIC:

PRINCIPLE 3: Be Here, Prepared To Be Nowhere Else

If you or someone else feels that a conversation is needed, it is. We may succeed in hearing every word yet miss the message altogether. You cannot be here, prepared to be nowhere else, when you are interrupted by beeps, buzzes, and bells. The conversation hasn't ended just because the *conversation* has ended; the conversation is ongoing.

PRINCIPLE 4: Tackle Your Toughest Challenge Today (Face the Bull)

Procrastinating about this conversation that you know you need to have with someone because of the relational dangers inherent in the situation will only prolong your agony over the issue. Facing the bull is a term in bullfighting that describes the moment when the matador is calmly facing the bull who is ready to charge him to see what he is doing. At that moment, the matador is aware of the danger and is using his own fear to focus on making the moves necessary. It shows us how to observe the other guy's behaviors or aggression and, by our own calm will, permit the "noise" of it to bounce off without affecting us. The key to facing a bull, or any dangerous relational situation, is in *staying calm*.

Tips for the "confrontation"

- Take it personally – the phrases "Don't take this personally" and "Don't take yourself so seriously" are misguided suggestions. *Do* take it seriously; do take *yourself* seriously
- Sometimes we put so many pillows around a message that the message gets lost altogether; we try to avoid inflicting pain – replace pillows with clear requests.
- Come straight at the issue. Get right to the point. Delivering a difficult message clearly, cleanly, and succinctly is essential. Say it in 60 seconds.

- If you know something must change, then you know that it is *you* who must change it.
 - When we spend a lifetime curbing our anger, our sadness, or our frustration for fear of offending others, in the process, we curb our joy.
-

Activity: Presenting the Issue – an exercise in assessing the issue head-on in a methodical manner. This process can help you organize your thoughts and feelings on the issue before you present that intense conversation.

Using one of the persons and the issue you have with that person from Principle 2, follow the instructions below to organize your conversation.

The group referred to in the last entry is either your group of employees or your peers with whom you want to discuss your issues.

The Issue is:

(Be concise. In one or two sentences, get to the heart of the problem. Is it a concern, challenge, opportunity, or recurring problem that is becoming more troublesome?)

It Is Significant Because:

(What's at stake? How does this affect dollars, income, people, products, services, customers, family, timing, the future, or other relevant factors? What is the future impact if the issue is not resolved?)

My Ideal Outcome Is:

(What specific results do I want?)

Relevant Background Information:

(Summarize with bulleted points: How, when, why, and where did the issue start? Who are the key players? Which forces are at work? What is the issue's current status?)

What I Have Done Up To This Point:

(What have I done so far? What options am I considering?)

What Help I Want From My Group Is:

(What result do I want from my group? For example, alternative solutions, confidence regarding the right decision, identification of consequences, where to find more information, critique of the current plan.)

Activity: Next Steps

Think about the intense conversations that you chose earlier. Choose one. Your first step is to write down the date by which you will have had this conversation.

DATE:

Now choose one of these conversations and prepare your opening statement by writing down exactly what you will say, covering the following steps:

1. Name the issue.
2. Select a specific example that illustrates the behavior or situation you want to change.
3. Describe your emotions about the issue.
4. Clarify what is at stake.
5. Identify your contribution to this problem.
6. Indicate your wish to resolve the issue.
7. Invite the other person involved to respond.

Once you're satisfied with the final draft, practice your opening statement until you own the words – until the words come out straight, clean, and clear. Have that conversation with the person you wish to address by the date you indicated.

With courage and practice, your discomfort in confronting difficult but important issues will lessen over time. The goal is for you to become current with the important people in your life. No more frustration. No more recurring anger.

PRINCIPLE 5: Obey Your Instincts

There are things our gut knows long before our intellect catches on. Examine more than surface evidence. Resist automatically accepting what you see at face value. How we enter intense conversations is how we emerge from them. What did you think, but not say? Sometimes we don't know what we think until we hear ourselves say it aloud.

Activity: Private Thoughts; Public Thoughts

We filter our private conversations, making public only what we assume will be heard, will not upset people, will get us what we want, or so forth. When we keep important thoughts private, our ability to learn and to make good decisions is reduced. But if we say what we think, we are afraid that it will make things worse by upsetting people or making ourselves vulnerable. Being diplomatic by keeping it private prevents us and others from learning.

Private Thoughts
What you think
Not visible/audible

Public Thoughts
What you say
Visible/audible

Examples:

"You're crazy. We can't do that."

"Sure. No problem."

"People are scared to death of you. There's no way they will tell you the truth."

"What does your staff think?"

Belief: Don't show what you feel.

Behavior: The Corporate Nod

Learn to listen to your thoughts and express them – appropriately. We have to pay attention to and value the messages we're receiving from ourselves. Essentially, think of your brain as split into left-hand, middle, and right-hand columns.

Private Thoughts
What you think and feel but don't say

Neutral Zone
You are aware of what you think and feel without attachment

Public Thoughts
What you see and hear. What is shared and known

Assumptions and judgments. Your private view.

You don't claim it's right or special. It just is. And you want to share it to see if it brings insight to the conversation.

Has your left-hand column been a royal pain to you? Here are some examples:

"Why is she talking like this? This isn't the real issue."

"I've lost the thread of this conversation. I'm completely disoriented."

"He says the plan's on track, but I sense an undercurrent of fear."

"He says everything is fine. I don't think he believes that."

These messages are valid. Why would we ignore them? If you continue to ignore them, you will stop getting them. Our instincts are there for a reason.

"The most valuable thing any of us can do is find a way to say the things that can't be said."

Bring some of your feeling and thoughts into that Neutral Zone and just notice that they're there. They're not right or wrong. They just exist. When you're ready you can bring these thoughts into

the public conversation. “While you were speaking I had a thought that I would like to check out with you...” This lets the other guy in on what you’ve been thinking and feeling. It doesn’t invite defensiveness because you have not interjected your thoughts as THE TRUTH.

You can also present your thoughts as a question, “Would you like to hear something I’m thinking right now?” Then, if he’s interested, share your thought.

A careful conversation is a failed conversation.

PRINCIPLE 6: Take Responsibility for Your Emotional Wake (“There are people who take the heart out of you and there are people who put it back.” Elizabeth David)

An emotional wake is what you remember after I’m gone. What you feel. The aftermath, aftertaste, or afterglow. ***What kind of wake do you want to leave behind you?***

Everything each one of us says leaves an emotional wake. You can appreciate how challenging it is to live up to the vow of becoming more conscious of the effect of our words and *how we say them* on others. In the end, the problem belongs to both parties. The most effective position to take is to focus on our own actions and words.

Our emotional wake determines the story that is told about each of us in the organization. What do I want them to remember when I’m gone? Are you saying it....clearly?

Who is responsible for providing this *understanding* we all crave so much?

The definition of communication is...the process by which one person *stimulates meaning in the mind of another* using both verbal and nonverbal messages. **YOU** are responsible, not the other guy. It’s your responsibility to make sure that you’ve stimulated the meaning you intended in the other guy’s mind.

You must extend to others what you want to receive. It begins with YOU. If you want someone to really listen to you, you must really listen to him. If you want someone to be honest with you, you must be honest with him. Do you want him to talk with you when there’s a problem? Then you have to talk with him when you have a problem.

Don’t sacrifice results for efficiency. Learn to deliver the message *without the load*. What’s the load? It’s the extra emotional weight that we put into our messages.

Can you think of some examples of loaded statements?

Have participants come up with some examples, then discuss some of these:

- Sugary sweet words with a malevolent undertone
- Blaming – the MOTHER of all loads. “This whole thing is all your fault. It’s you, not me. You really screwed this thing up.”
- Name-calling, labeling – “You’re an insensitive narcissist.” “You’re a liar.” “You’re a failure.”
- Sarcasm; black humor – “Apparently your life goal is to live on the cutting edge of mediocrity.” “Seems you’ve hit bottom and have started to dig.”

- Attaching global weight to tip-of-the-iceberg stuff. “You don’t love me and never did.” “This ruins everything. We’re finished.”
- Threatening/intimidating – “Guess you don’t value your job.” “You do this one more time and...” “Look, I don’t want to pull rank, but...”
- Exaggerating – “You always do this.” “Never once have you...” “This is the hundredth time...”
- Pointing to someone else’s failure to communicate, assuming a position of superiority; the other person is clearly inferior. “You don’t get it.” “You can’t handle it.” “You aren’t making any sense at all.” “I can’t get through to you.”
- Saying “if I were you...”
- Gunnybagg – bringing up all of the old baggage.
- Assassinating someone in public – this is sneaky and cowardly. We’re trying to get away with it by pretending it’s funny. “Oh, yeah. She thinks she’s such hot stuff.”
- Asking “Why did you do that?” instead of “What were you trying to do?”
- Making blatantly negative facial expressions. If we’re angry, disgusted, or disappointed, it will leak out somewhere on our faces.
- Layering our interpretation on something the other guy has said or done, ascribing negative or false motives – “What you really mean is...” “What’s really going on here is...”
- Being unresponsive, refusing to speak – may be the cruelest load you can attach to your message. To others, it feels like a lack of caring, or a lack of validation.

Which is worse – not delivering your message at all or delivering a message with a load attached? Unfortunately what many people do with their anger is bite their tongues. Intense conversations fade and die because we don’t confess, even to ourselves, that we are not always operating from love and harmony. Jealousy, fear, revenge can influence those conversations.

How do we reconcile being real, delivering the real message, while taking responsibility for our emotional wakes? Can we reconcile our feelings of anger with authenticity? How can we deliver our messages clearly and cleanly, without the load?

We have to get in touch with our intent – if your intent is sinister or negative, now is not the time to speak. If it’s good, it’s possible to admit your anger and still leave a positive emotional wake.

Communication tips: don’t begin your comments with “Truthfully...” “Frankly...” “Honestly...” Most of us question if the person is actually speaking truthfully when they say these things.

Do your best to be truthful, but cause no harm.

Activity: Crafting Your Message

Write down the name of someone at work or home to whom you need to deliver a difficult message.

What is your idea behind this conversation? You have a responsibility to come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it REAL, while taking responsibility for your emotional wake. Start to craft your message, taking care not to attach a load to it. Practice saying it out loud. Then go to the person and say it.

PRINCIPLE 7: Let Silence Do the Heavy Lifting

The best leaders talk *with* people, not *at* them. Talking *at* people is a common affliction. It's really difficult to get a foothold in a conversation filled with a lot of noise. ALWAYS turn off your cell phone or turn down your office phone so that you're not distracted by the noise.

Silence makes most of us nervous. We may think that silence signals a lack of interest. Is there any other way you can show interest without talking? How about your posture, facial expressions?

Intense conversations *require* silence. The more emotionally loaded the subject, the more silence is required. Here are some signs that silence is needed:

- Interrupting by talking over someone else
- Formulating your own response while someone is talking
- Responding quickly with little or no thought
- Attempting to be clever, competent, impressive, charming, etc.
- Jumping in with advice before an issue has been clarified
- Using silence or break in the conversation to create a distraction by changing topics
- Talking in circles, nothing new emerging
- Monopolizing the airspace

The real work is being done in the silence. It's the most powerful tool in our communication toolbox.

Dangerous Silence – the silence of non-participation, of passivity which says *I really don't care what you think or do*. There is a cold silence between people who are angry with each other. A hostile silence can be more damaging to a work relationship than a full disclosure.